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RIYADH PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN, DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM KISL SA

SUBJECT: INSIDE THE JEDDAH MUNICIPAL COUNCIL: CURRENT PROJECTS AND FUTURE PLANS

Classified By: Tatiana C. Gfoeller for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY AND COMMENT: In meetings with Jeddah Municipal Councilors, including Council President Tarek Fadaak and Vice President Hasan Zahrani, Post has learned of how the Council troubleshoots resident concerns, the nature of ongoing projects, and plans for the future. In the past two years it has overseen Municipality projects on road repair, construction of new cemeteries, and clean-up and construction of parks. Since the new year, it has had to grapple with two major issues: landfill fires and the resulting health effects as well as the near-demolition of a zoo.

¶2. (C) The Council continues to encourage Jeddawis to provide feedback on how the Council can better address residents' concerns through an initiative known as "Friends of Jeddah," and to facilitate workshops to improve the technical expertise of local professionals focusing on Jeddah's urban development. Additionally, Council President Fadaak shared with Pol Chief his hopes to televise Council meetings and for Councilors to participate in international exchanges. Despite Fadaak's renewed enthusiasm, the question remains whether Jeddawis consider the Council legitimate or effective (Septel). END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

#### FOCUS OF THE COUNCIL: POLLUTION TO PARKS

¶3. (C) According to Jeddah Municipal Council President Tarek Fadaak and Vice President Hasan Zahrani the Jeddah Municipal Council focuses on four main issues: pollution, health, infrastructure, and parks. (COMMENT: Fadaak is a SAG-appointed Councilor, a member of King Abdulaziz University faculty, and considered a "liberal" by Jeddah elite; Zahrani is an elected Councilor, a member of the Religious Police, and considered a "conservative." END COMMENT.) In the past two years the Council has approved the budget for and tracked the progress of Municipality projects on road repair, construction of new cemeteries, and clean-up and construction of parks.

#### TROUBLESHOOTING PROBLEMS: LANDFILL FIRES TO NEAR-DEMOLITION OF ZOO

¶4. (C) In the new year, the Council has tried to address the problem of burning garbage, a lack of parks, and the near-relocation of a zoo. Concerning "dump fires," their efforts have included visits to garbage sites as well as educating Jeddah residents on the resulting health effects, such as Council President Fadaak's January 19 remarks in English-language daily Saudi Gazette. The Council is preparing a report regarding the environmental effects of recent fires at a Jeddah landfill and will submit it soon to the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, which oversees the Council.

¶ 15. (C) Fadaak and Zahrani also informed Pol Chief of a successful park clean-up project and Municipal Councilor (and former Council President) Rabah Al-Daheri stated that the Council has approved for 2008 the construction of 150 parks. Regarding the near-demolition of a local zoo, Fadaak told Pol Chief that the Council requested Mayor Adel Fakieh stop immediately destruction of the zoo after learning that the Municipality began the demolition without waiting for Council approval. (COMMENT: Council-Municipality tension is a common problem plaguing Council operations (Septel). END COMMENT.) The Municipal Council plans to recommend that the zoo remain at its current location.

ONGOING INITIATIVES: CITIZEN NETWORKS TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

¶ 16. (C) A growing Council initiative is "Friends of Jeddah." Council President Fadaak explained to Pol Chief on January 21 that it is an informal network of 40-50 Jeddah residents that report to the Council on complaints ranging from the state of the roads to the recent problem of landfill fires. While the Municipality Office has its own mechanism to handle complaints (known as "940:" the number people can dial to report a problem), the Council wanted to offer a more "personable" and "reliant" service. During a February 12 meeting, Fadaak elaborated on a related initiative: plans to place advertisements soliciting resident feedback on Municipality projects and services in local newspapers in late February.

¶ 17. (C) Another Council project is the organizing of workshops to foster technical expertise among Jeddah's urban development-related professionals. Council President Fadaak and Vice President Zahrani told Pol Chief that they try to

host such workshops every four months. Typically, they said, the lecturers include well-known professionals from a specific field, such as architecture in the most recent case.

Fadaak added that attendees often comprise Councilors, members of the "intelligentsia," and "a select few others" that are active in the featured field.

FUTURE PLANS: TELEVISED MEETINGS TO INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES

¶ 18. (C) A future goal, Fadaak mentioned, was to inform people of the purpose and activities of the Council, adding that he hoped to seek permission to televise Council meetings. He argued that if the Majlis Ashura can, so can the Jeddah Municipal Council. (NOTE: Jeddah Municipal Council meetings are not open to the public; only specific invitees can attend. When asked whether Pol Chief could attend, Municipal Councilor Muhammad Abu Dawood replied: "I am not ready to die yet." END NOTE.) He also added that he would like to establish a "Supreme Council of Experts" that would meet with the Council a few times a year. When prompted about which experts he would include, he stated a preference for "the most prominent" Jeddawis in business, architecture, and engineering.

¶ 19. (C) Council President Fadaak and Vice President Zahrani also expressed interest in organizing a visit for Jeddah Municipal Council members to observe American City Councils. He said that the Council would benefit greatly from observing municipal councils in cities "on the cutting edge," citing Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington. (NOTE: Fadaak's travel and study experience was in the northwestern United States. END NOTE.) Fadaak reiterated the Council's desire to participate in such a program at the Consul General's recent roundtable on political and economic development, adding that such programs are critical to learning how a council should function.

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